XIO3

Garden City Atari Computer Enthusiasts
1003 Amphion St. Victoria, B.C. Canada V8S 4G2

GCACE

July/August 1995

July 27 Meeting!

The July meeting will be focused on entertainment, featuring everything from games on Rowland Grants Atari 800 to a demonstration of the Jaguar of the CyberGamenut, Ted Skrecky.

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ATARI® NEWS AND RUMOURS

by Rowland Grant

The Jaguar game console and its games were not selling very briskly in the first three months of 1995. This is borne out by Atari's first quarter financial statement. Net sales were $4.8 million compared with $8.1 million for the same period last year. This resulted in a first quarter operating loss of $5.1 million this year compared to about $3.3 million last year. Earlier this year Jaguar game machines seemed to be in short supply locally. And there were indications that this shortage was more widespread. Perhaps Atari was being cautious. Perhaps it was trying to avoid too large an inventory when other factors, such as the lack of new games, is holding back sales. Also the cut in prices and heavy discounting of older stock would add to the poor showing, even if actual sales volume improved. I would estimate that currently Atari is selling fewer than ten thousand Jaguar consoles per month world wide. This does not seem to be bothering Atari very much. It has been explained that there are two markets for game consoles. One is the game playing hobbyist, who may own several different game consoles, and buys throughout the year. The other is the mass market, and particularly the gift buyer during the December holiday season. Both markets need to be served, but the big profits are usually made by selling in the mass market in the last quarter. As Sam Tramiel says "... With a retail price of $159 or less, the 64-bit Jaguar is in a good position to be the upgrade choice for present 16-bit game owners. We are focused on developing software for the Jaguar and preparing for the upcoming fall selling season."

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CREDITS

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MEMBERSHIP

Membership dues are $25 per family per year. Membership includes a subscription to this newsletter, access to over 300 8-bit public domain disks and 155 ST disks and increased time and upload/download ratio on the club BBS, Pothole. It can be reached by modem at (604) 642-6795.

MEETINGS

Meetings will be held in the Nellie McClung branch of the Library at 3950 Cedar Hill Road (corner of McKenzie) on the fourth Thursday of each month. All meetings are at 7 pm. There is no meeting in the month of December. Copying of club ST public domain disks is done at meetings. Bring a blank, formatted disk for each PD disk you want. For 8-bit copying, please phone the club 8-bit librarian.

EDITORIAL

I have been tinkering with the newsletter again in an effort to make it easier to read and more visually interesting. I have been taking a correspondance Journalism course from the University of Regina, and the professor mentioned on one of his tapes that he also taught desktop publishing and he would be happy to critique any examples which I sent to him. Consequently, XIO3 and also a newsletter I edit for the Canadian Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, Victoria Chapter, were sent. As a result of his comments regarding XIO3, I changed the main font to Cherry Garamond, which I feel is a little lighter and easier to read than the previous Times font. Other changes are mainly cosmetic and hopefully make the newsletter easier to to read and enjoy.

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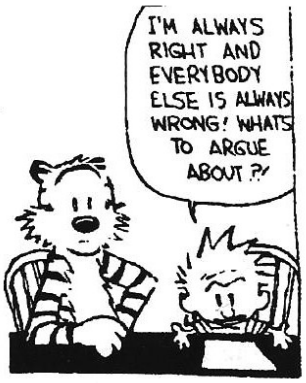
PEEKing Around

by Gordon F. Hooper



... Welcome to new members LORENA MOORE and JOE DZIEWULSKI. Joe is a corresponding member from Duncan ... TED SKRECKY, known as the CyberLord on the club BBS, has gone on a Commodore 64 buying spree. Ted got some 5 1/4 disks from the Value Village, which he intended to format, but he discovered some commercial games for the Atari 8-bit and the Commie 64. The CyberGamenut then decided to get a Commie so he could play the games. He got them all cheap, but none work. He hopes to eventually gather enough parts so that he will end up with a working computer. He reports he was making a repair on one computer using a steak knife. Hope you unplugged it, CyberFried ... You'll be happy to know BOB NEX got his toy airplane out of the tall fir tree. I guess radio-controlled models are too expensive to leave for the forest elves. I'm expecting my access to the Pothole to be severely restricted if I continue much longer with this tale ... MARK ERICKSON, our member in Courtney, keeps in touch via the Pothole and reports that the Jester BBS is back up in that city. It might be worth a look for Atari files. The number is 1-604-338-5543 ... Thanks to ARNOLD NAPP and GEORGE ROSE for hosting, respectively, the Internet SIG and Social SIG back in May. Participants all had a good time ... CHRIS SHERWOOD, past editor of this rag, came to my house recently to offer some assistance with my updated version of Calamus SL. It ended up that I had to send e-mail to DMC Publishers to get the answer and he wanted me to ask how much they wanted for the Windows NT version of Calamus SL. He claims he can't find a desktop publisher for the IBM as good as Calamus and is considering getting the Windows version. Of course, that means he also has to spend $400 dollars for Windows NT. Sure glad I kept my Atari. E-mail is wonderful, I typed out the questions at 11 pm Sunday and the answers were there at 10 am Monday ... Don't forget I'm depending on you to skulk around dark alleys looking for dirt for this column. Phone GORD at 475-0857 when you find it ...

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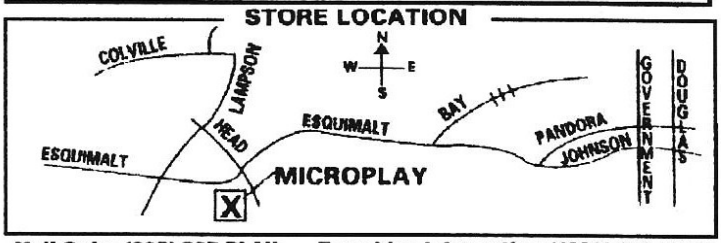

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LOCATIONS NATIONWIDE

In August and September, retailers put in their orders for Christmas sales. Atari will have to be ready by then.

The Electronic Entertainment Exposition (or E3) took place in Los Angeles on May 11th to 13th. It was a trade fair and the general public was excluded. Atari was there of course. I understand that Atari's Jaguar display was well organized, attractive, but relatively small. It was squeezed between the huge displays by Sega and Sony. Sega showed its new Saturn game console, and made a splash by announcing the U.S. release of the Saturn in May. The Sony Playstation is to be released in September, but a number of very impressive Playstation games were being shown. Atari demonstrated two working models of the virtual reality helmet. By all accounts they were very impressive and prevented Atari from being upstaged altogether. The VR helmets were running a shooting game called Zone Hunter. The screen in the helmet responds to your movements. You can look all around yourself, and up or down into 3D scenery. Zone Hunter is a kind of VR version of DOOM. It was running off a computer (one person said that it was a TT), however the Jaguar version is expected to perform just as well. One or two persons reported being somewhat disoriented after trying the helmet. Quite a number of different Jaguar games were on display, but apparently only a few looked anywhere near completion. Most of the CD ROM games were said to look as though they needed more work, although they all showed quite a bit of progress since the Winter CES in January. A few of the better games that are near completion (RAYMAN, THEA REALM FIGHTERS, ULTRA VORTEX) got the big screen treatment and had decorated theme areas. The new Jaguar six button joypad was also being demonstrated. Among the displays were several untitled game concept demonstrations. Atari promises about 50 new Jaguar games by Christmas. The many varied displays makes that promise credible.

An interview with Sam Tramiel was published in the July '95 issue of Next Generation magazine. Sam said that Jaguar sales had picked up after the price reduction and revealed that the price had dropped again to $149 (US). Sam is clearly hoping that the low price will

JAGUAR

undermine the competition. When asked about the rumoured pricing of Sony's Playstation at $249, Sam said that because the Japanese price is around $500, this would be dumping. He promised that Atari would take the matter to the International Trade Commission for prosecution if Sony sold the Playstation at $249 or even $299. Sam mentioned that Time Warner Interactive is developing a new series of arcade game machines based on the Jaguar technology. This new system, called Kojag may be in the arcades this summer. Five or six game titles are being developed for the Kojags. These games will eventually find their way into the Jaguar consoles. Sam said that the CD players for the Jaguar will be released when the "software is right". He is expecting that about half of the Jaguar users will buy a CD player eventually. The virtual reality helmet for the Jaguar is not a sure thing. Sam said that if VR doesn't work out as planned then Atari will not sell it. At any rate, the VR helmet will not be ready before 1996. He maintained that the Jaguar is as good a machine as any of its competitors. He wasn't impressed by Sega's Saturn which he termed "a mess". As far as the Sony Playstation is concerned, the next generation Jaguar will "blow it away". Finally, Sam said that Atari should be the main game developer and publisher for the Jaguar. He pointed out that all the game hardware makers must become significant publishers on their own platforms if they want to succeed.

Prior to the 3E show some Atari staff made a tour of certain electronic games stores in Silicon Valley. They set up displays of the latest Jaguar games, including some games in progress. Jeff Minter was there demonstrating the first two levels of Defender 2000. From all reports this arcade type game will be a winner. It was also amusing to hear that Jeff was having trouble trying to beat his own game. After all the shows in May, Jeff says that he is glad to get back to creative work. Jeff is a programming genius, he seems to have mastered the Jaguar quickly and needs little help to put together an outstanding game on schedule. Most game developers need more support. The lack of a good software development kit for the Jaguar is thought to be the main reason for the endless software delays and poor quality of some game titles. The large amount of

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base system code that needs to be written by each software developer independently makes the Jaguar the single most expensive system to program for. Of course, it takes time to refine routines on a new chip set. Atari didn't have the time or the resources to create a proper development environment before releasing the machine. Atari depended on outside contractors for almost all software work. For some time, Brainstorm of France has been constantly refining the Jaguar tools, and sending them out to developers. So the Jaguar development kit today is very much better than the one issued in 1993, but it still does not match the kits for other game consoles. There is a C compiler that addresses the Jaguar RISC chips, however it has bugs and limitations. It has been reported that compiled C code, running through the Jaguar's RISC chips only, is up to four times as fast as optimized 68000 assembly code. A reliable C compiler with lots of special libraries would be a great help. Other systems have such compilers. It has been estimated that original Jaguar games would take 12 months to complete, and port-overs would take about six months. Perhaps better tools would reduce this time requirement.

Jeff Minter's Tempest 2000 is being redone for the PC. Sam Tramiel has remarked that it takes a fast '486 PC to run Tempest 2000 as well as it runs on the Jaguar. There is a series of Highlander games on CD nearing completion. These are being developed by Atari for the Jaguar and the Pentium PC at the same time. We may see more parallel development in future. Indeed, if Atari becomes a successful software developer and publisher for other platforms, the Jaguar could go on indefinitely. There is no doubt that this is Atari's intention. Apparently, sales of the older Sega game consoles are declining, and Sega is cutting its programming staff in the U.S. Twenty-five Sega programmers were recently let go. There are rumours that Atari has interviewed them all, and hired many. Atari has been using the proceeds from the Sega settlement to acquire software titles and licences. But most of all Atari has been hiring key programmers and managers, mainly from Sega itself. Atari has set up a new "Atari Magic" entertainment software division under the direction of ex-Sega master programmer Francois Bertrand. On the management end, Atari has hired two top industry veterans who also have worked for Sega. Dean Fox will be senior vice president of marketing and Jon Correll is vice president of software product development. Also Theodore Hoff has joined Atari as president of North American operations. Hoff has experience in sales and marketing of entertainment software at Time Warner and Fox Interactive. This is beginning to look like one of the most professional teams that Atari has ever assembled. With it Atari could become a very significant force in the entertainment software industry. It will take time of course, and (perhaps) a minimum of interference from the Tramiels.

To meet the competition, the advanced Jaguar II is being planned for release sometime in 1996. Developer kits should be available by September this year. So games that fully exploit the Jaguar II will not be available before September next year. They would have had the kits ready earlier but Motorola was a bit late with the new chips. Atari will supply a C++ compiler for the Jaguar II which should make port-overs easier, especially for those who do games for Electronic Arts. The new Jaguar II will be fully compatible with the current Jaguar. But it will have additional capacities and much greater speed. It is estimated that the Jaguar II will run up to four times faster than the Sony Playstation. The new chips are called Tom& and Jerry&. These can do parallel processing. There will also be a 68EC020 chip and 8 MB of RAM. The Tom& chip contains five RISC processors, A 64 bit Graphics Processing Unit, a 64-bit Object processor, a 64 bit Blitter, a 64 bit Texture Mapping Engine and a 64-bit J/MPEG decompressor. Jerry& is the Digital Signal Processor. Tom& does the video processing and Jerry& does the sound. It is possible that the Jaguar II will come with a CD ROM drive built in. At the same time, the current Jaguar is still being improved. A project, code named Tornado, is attempting to consolidate the Tom, Jerry and 68000 on one large chip. This could reduce Jaguar production costs and allow a new low price (rumoured around $100). It all sounds good.

... Atari could become a significant force in software ...

After a few months with scarcely any new game releases, Hover Strike was issued in May, and two more games followed in June. Titles are Pinball Fantasies and Super Burnout. The first of these is a pinball machine simulator, and so far has earned quite favourable comment. Super Burnout is a motor bike racing game. It has been available for a short time, but initial reaction is good. At the E3 show, Atari handed out a general schedule of game releases. The staff at the Atari booth maintained that the schedule

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was realistic and that most of the games would be released as planned. Therefore July might see seven cartridge games. There are rumours that Ultra Vortek, and White Men Can't Jump have gone into production in June. Rayman, a very attractive game by Ubisoft of France, is going into production in July. Four more cartridge games should be out in August. One of the titles is a remake of Pitfall, a game that was popular on the Atari 2600 game machine. More significant, ten CD games are due for August. If they really are available, we can expect to see the Jag CD units in the stores. The ten CD titles cover almost every game type including some popular adventure games such as Myst and Robinson's Requiem. In September, six more cartridge games should turn up. Among these may be the long awaited Battlesphere space shooter. Three more CD games in September might include Soul Star, a popular port-over. Six more cartridge games and sixteen more CD games are slated for release during the last quarter of this year. Moreover, there are other Jaguar games not on Atari's list that may turn up for the holiday season. It's quite likely that some of the expected games will not be ready on time. However even half of these titles should give Jaguar sales considerable momentum. To maintain momentum, Atari expects to release another nine games in the first half of 1996. A number of titles which were listed for this year seem to have been dropped from Atari's list. Among them are Tiny Toons, Legion of the Undead and Konan. However, the Towers role playing game for the Falcon is being rewritten for the Jaguar. This is an extra not on Atari's list.

Electronic Arts is the major games publisher for many platforms, particularly for 3DO.

ic Arts was a strong supporter of the old Atari 800 computers, but later it favoured the A Amiga over the ST. Atari has finally got Electronic Arts to sign on for the Jaguar. Electronic arts will be porting over six of its popular titles to the Jaguar (CD version). In another development, Atari is working with Time Warner to create interactive movies. The first project's title is Caves of Fear. With the Jag CD unit, Atari is attempting to create truly interactive movies with rapid response. Unlike current interactive movies, each decision leads the player down a different path of circumstances, allowing for a different game each time it's played, the ultimate adventure game!

... Jaguar's sort of spreading like a virus in Europe ...

In his Next Generation interview, Sam Tramiel mentioned that 150 thousand Jaguar units had been sold in the U.S. The sales in Canada and Europe have not been totalled, however an estimated 200 thousand Jaguars had been sold in total by January 1995. It has been reported that 6 thousand Jaguars have been sold in Sweden (population 9 million). So Jaguars have sold to about 0.07 percent of the population. The U.S. sales total gives close to the same percentage. On that basis Canadian sales should be about 19 thousand, but I have no way to check. Also total Jaguar sales in Western Europe should be above 210 thousand, for an approximate world total of about 380 thousand. There is a rumour that 349 thousand units of Alien vs Predator have been sold. However, in view of the rather poor net sales income in the first quarter, I am sceptical of any total above 300 thousand. For one thing, distribution of the Atari Jaguar has not been uniform in Europe. In Sweden, pre-orders of Jag CD units are said to equal half of the Jaguar sales. Sam Tramiel is expecting that ratio to apply in the U.S. as well. Is there a unique Jaguar synchronicity between Sweden and the U.S.?

Anecdotal reports all confirm that the price reduction has stimulated Jaguar sales. Reports from Holland say the Jaguar is outselling all the competition. The low price tag (it undersells the Sega 32X) and the A vs P game are the reason. I hear that there is no Atari advertising in Europe except for Britain. Someone said that the Jaguar's "sort of spreading like a virus" in Europe. The low price has caused U.S. mass marketers such as Montgomery Ward and Wal-Mart to reconsider Atari. It is rumoured that the Jaguar will be in the Sears Christmas Wishbook and the J.C. Penny catalogue this year. There were claims that because of the lack of games, people were dumping their Jaguar systems. However, stores are reporting that there is a good market for used Jaguars and games, and few used

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Jaguars were available. In North America, the individual stores report Jaguar sales of 1 to 3 a week, and about ten game sales per week. This is similar to 3DO sales.

A magazine devoted to the Atari Jaguar is due to be published in July. It is called The Jaguar's Edge. Subscriptions are $15 for six issues. The first issue will be 32 pages printed on high gloss stock. Distribution will be by mail and through game outlets. The publisher is John Marcotte, news editor is Travis Guy (also editor of Atari Explorer Online), and features editor is Pat Solomon. On another topic, there are rumours that Microsoft is looking at Atari as a possible acquisition. The reason is that Atari has been working on an interface that would link the Jaguar to Microsoft's new Marvel online service, which is due to be launched during the holiday season. The stock market has not taken this rumour seriously as Atari's stock has remained below $3.00 for some time. I notice that Atari bonds are selling at about 51 cents on the dollar with a yield of over 17.7 percent. This is another sign of Atari's status in the financial markets.

... rumours that Microsoft is looking at Atari as a possible acquisition ...

At the moment, C-Lab in Germany is selling a Falcon computer clone for about $3000. This model has features that make it especially useful with the C-Lab's music systems. C-Lab's license prevents it from competing directly with existing Atari Falcons while they are still available. However, as existing stocks in Europe are nearly exhausted, there is a rumour that a much cheaper Falcon is being developed that may sell for under $2000. GeSoft's Eagle is another TOS computer. Using TOS 3.06, it is more of a TT clone. The current model is built around a 32 MHz 68030 processor. With a 24 bit PCI graphics card and 8MB of RAM, it costs about $4000. A model of the Eagle using a faster 68040 processor has been advertised for $3000, without the graphics card or RAM. A Power PC card for the Eagle is also under development. The Eagle has a true 32 bit bus, it uses a separate card for graphics, it can use up to 14 MB of ST memory and up to 256 MB of TT fast RAM. It has all the standard TT ports and several extras. It comes in a tower case and can use a standard PC keyboard. A somewhat lower price could make the Eagle attractive. Many Falcon owners would like to upgrade also. Wizztronics is putting the finishing touches on the Barracuda 68040 accelerator for the Falcon. There are said to be over 1000 pre-orders for this product. There are rumours that Wizztronics is planning to develop a Macintosh Power PC clone with TOS compatibility. It is also rumoured that Steve Cohen of Wizztronics wants to continue the development of TOS and GEM, and that he has made an offer to Atari for what's left of Atari's computer division.

These new TOS computers are almost hand made, and hence they are somewhat expensive. A cheaper approach is to use an emulator or a simulator. The emulator is Dareck Mihocka's Gemulator in a fast PC. Version 4.0 of this software is due to be released this September or October. One version will run under Windows, including Win95, another will run under OS/2. There are rumours that the range of ST software compatibility will be expanded. Gemulator requires a fast '486 or Pentium computer because it has to emulate a Motorola 68000 processor. I understand that CPU emulation reduces the apparent speed of a computer by a factor of ten. So the fastest Intel based PC may only speed up ST software by a factor of two to four.

A simulator like MagiCMac may provide more speed. MagiCMac is a Macintosh program that runs a Mac as if it were a ST using the multi-tasking MagiC operating system. Since the ST and the Mac use Motorola 680x0 processors, no emulation is required. MagiC and its associated desk top program is so much more efficient than the Mac's System 7 that some ST programs have been reported as running much faster than comparable Mac software. To quote one observer, "MagiCMac points out with extraordinary clarity what a pathetic state the Mac OS is in... we are not talking subtle speed increases ... disk operations are up to hundreds of times faster than the Mac's..." MagiCMac handles all attached Mac hardware with no problem. Also one can multi-task between MagiC and System 7. ST and Mac software can run in

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Pothole BBS 8-Bit Files

by John Picken

8-bit and 8-bit emulator users who log on to The Pothole may have noticed some major changes in the file SIGs. We've gone from four SIGs to nine and attempted to classify files more accurately by type and purpose. The new SIGs are:

[1] 8-bit Entertainment

[2] 8-bit Communications

[3] 8-bit Technical

[4] 8-bit Graphics/Sound

[5] 8-bit Magazines

[6] 8-bit Productivity

[7] 8-bit Programming

[8] 8-bit Emulators

[9] 8-bit SpartaDOS

The following describes the content of each new 8-bit SIG and what determines what goes where.

[1] 8-bit Entertainment: includes all games, amusement and novelty programs. Basically, if the program has no purpose other than amusement, you will find it here.

[2] 8-bit Communications: includes all files dealing with any aspect of communication by modem or null modem, including terminal programs, utilities, compression and decompression programs, etc. This SIG takes precedence over others in that, if a file deals with modem communication, including programming, it will appear here.

[3] Technical: deals with operating systems, disk operating systems, disk utilities, DOS utilities, device handlers, computer hardware hacks and repairs, etc. This is sort of a "catch-all" SIG. Where a program could apply to this SIG and another, you will find it here. For example, a combined sector editor/disassembler will be found here even though a disassembler is a programming aid.

[4] Graphics/Sound: includes all demos, picture files and viewers, drawing programs, music files and players. Excluded are picture printers (in Productivity), graphics or sound programming aids and character editors and fonts (in Programming) and hardware hacks (in Technical).

[5] 8-bit Magazines: includes disks released with hardcopy magazines and stand-alone disk magazines. Often, individual files from these disks will appear in other applicable SIGs. This SIG also contains disk catalogues released by GCACE and other user groups as well as by PD distributors.

[6] 8-bit Productivity: includes all files relating to things such as word processing, printing, accounting, data bases, etc. Essentially, this SIG deals with real world applications for the Atari-8 including non-computer hardware repairs and operation (eg. TV test pattern generators, etc.

[7] 8-bit Programming: includes only programming languages and systems, aids, utilities and tutorials.

[8] 8-bit Emulators: includes all files dealing with emulation of the Atari-8 by other computers, transfer of 8-bit files to or from incompatible computers (excluding via null-modem), and hardware to permit interconnection of Atari-8 equipment to an incompatible computer.

[9] 8-bit SpartaDOS: includes SpartaDOS itself in several versions, and all files designed to be used exclusively with it. It is doubtful that any file in this SIG will work under any other DOS. Where applicable, files that work only under SpartaDOS-X are so indicated in the description. The only non-Sparta item you will find here is BW-DOS which is designed to be Sparta-compatible.

If you only use an 8-bit, the only other SIG you might find of interest is "Atari Text and Doc". Generally however, if Ted grabs something interesting via the InterNet and places it here, I extract the 8-bit only stuff and put it into the applicable 8-bit SIG in ATASCII format.

The file work is far from complete. The initial batch file I sent Bob to set up the 8-bit SIGs took something like 90 minutes to run. We've attempted to ensure that there are no duplicates and that only the latest versions of a program are included. Where multiple versions of a program are present, the description will tell you why.

A few of the files may produce error messages when you unARC them as a result of the inevitable disk glitch which occurs on any system. If you get error reports when uncompressing files, use the file with extreme caution if it's an executable one, i.e. put it on a "doesn't matter" disk and try it out. If it's a "doc" or something similar, the error, if any, should appear when you load the file into a word

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Run Your 8-Bit on an IBM!

by Rowland Grant

Fine Tooned Engineering has moved from California to Arizona. Proprietor Mike Hohman says that he has larger facilities, and (I gather) overhead costs are lower. The new address is: Fine Tooned Engineering, PO Box 31270, Mesa, AZ 5275. At ACE '95 in Toronto, Mike had working prototypes of both the MARS enhancement and the MIO II hard drive interface for Atari 800XL computers. This move will stall the already much delayed production of these products. Still, Mike says that he has finished tinkering with the circuits. So the next step is production (whenever). Mike says that when shipments are ready, he will release a catalogue of all his offerings. There are rumours that Mike is no longer running Fine Tooned on a full time basis.

There have been only two issues of Atari Classics so far this year. I gather that Bob Woolley has been left with much of the work. Bob has devoted most of his spare time to Atari Classics. Perhaps those working on the magazine should try four issues a year, or whatever they can handle. The March/April issue is quite interesting. I had heard rumours of a modification that enables our NTSC video computers to handle PAL software from Europe. And there it was, an article by Nir Dary in Atari Classics explaining exactly how this could be done. A number of recent European games will only run on PAL computers, and some of theses games are said to be well worth doing the modification. Ben Poehland, the original editor of Atari Classics was back with another of his entertaining and informative 8-bit Alchemist articles. In Britain, New Atari User magazine is still going, but I notice that its associated Accessory Shop is dropping commercial software and books.

BW-DOS is an excellent disk operating system that runs on all Atari 8-bit computers. It uses a disk structure and commands similar to those of Sparta DOS. Jiri Bernasek of BEWESOFT has not only released BW-DOS as freeware, but he is actively supporting and updating it. Recently Jiri has issued some new utility files. MENU.COM, the excellent menu shell has been extended and improved. RAMDISK.COM will now create ramdisks up to one megabyte, and there are some new options. DIRMAST.COM is an upgrade of the directory master program. MOVE.COM is a new command that moves a file or directory to another directory on the same disk, without having to erase anything. RTIME8.COM and ARGSRTC.COM are drivers for the two hardware clocks that are available for Atari 8-bit computers. ARGSPRN.COM is a printer driver for the ARGS RTC module. BWDFUNC.BAS is a program in BASIC that illustrates the use of BW-DOS from BASIC.

PC Xformer, the Atari 8-bit emulator that runs on Intel '486 or Pentium computers is being upgraded by Branch Always Software. The latest version, PC Xformer 4.0, is due out sometime this summer. The new version will now support sound, and is supposed to work with almost any PC sound card. The current version 3.0 emulates a 130XE and can use PC printers, modems and joysticks. A new freeware preview version of PC Xformer (ver 2.52) was recently released. I understand that someone is preparing a CD ROM disk of Atari 8-bit software disk images for use with the PC Xformer. Other Atari emulators are rumoured to be in development on other computer platforms including the Macintosh and the Amiga. However, David Firth in Britain is known to have an Atari 800 emulator running on Unix computers. This is limited to text displays. It can run simple BASIC programs and text-based games. It has run on Vax/VMS, Sun, Solaris and Hewlett-Packard work stations. A version running under Unix X-Windows is currently in the works. I gather that the new version will emulate more of the Atari's capabilities.

Keith Ledbetter created BBS Express Professional, the foremost BBS software for 8-bit Atari computers. Pothole BBS is an Express Pro board. Interested in moving on to other platforms (DOS) Keith sold his interest in the software to Bob Kass of K-Products. Bob will sell a complete private BBS, hardware and software, ready to run, for $750. He has complained that there is scant interest among Atari 8-bit users for new Express boards or for software upgrades. Now Bob Kass has another worry. He heard that a court had found the

... he has complained of scant interest ...

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commercial network Prodigy liable for prosecution if persons use the network to disseminate slander. Bob felt that as owner of the rights to the Express software, he might be found liable for any legal indiscretions posted on the Express network. Bob issued a general statement that if any Express Pro BBS contained messages that could lead to lawsuits, he would request that they cease to use his software. He recommended that Express Net sysops carefully monitor their boards and censor anything that they think could lead to lawsuits. As more information on the Prodigy case came in, it appears that ordinarily a BBS or a network has some immunity to prosecution since it is a common carrier like the telephone company. Prodigy was ruled not to be a common carrier because it did have a policy of censoring and editing messages. So Express boards following Bob Kass's advice might not be seen as common carriers. What is worse, I understand that Bob has offended the Express users by his claim that because they use his software, they have to run their BBS's in a manner approved by him. Not too good for business.

American TechnaVision, one of the few remaining suppliers of Atari 8-bit software and hardware, has published a flyer entitled "Atari 8-bit Liquidation". They are selling off much of their 8-bit stock to make room for PC stuff. For those interested in collecting spare parts, they are offering very low unit prices for volume sales. For instance, ten XE power supplies sell for $75. American TechnaVision says that the sale does not mean that they are abandoning Atari products, but at the current level of sales it may not be worth while holding Atari computer inventory beyond this year. Richard Gore of Leeds England is trying to keep going. I notice that he has a few game titles that I haven't seen before. Bubble Zone is a bubbles on a grid shoot up. In another game, Tube Baddies, the baddies must be stunned and bounced off walls into collection buckets. Black Lamp is a platform adventure game boasting advanced graphics and sound. Richard offers two utility programs. GTRACKER, is a new sequencer program for digitized sound samples. And Super Print Lab XE for 128K XL/XE computers is a monochrome design and print (Epson) program. There are still some 8-bit game programmers around. William Kendrick programs for Atari 8-bit, DOS and Unix platforms and distributes them through his New Breed Software label. William does his 8-bit work using the Action! computer language. He has released three games for beta testing. These are Cooltris 2, a tetris type shootup, Simple Shanghai, a Mah Jong game (non-playable demo), and Bros 2, a SuperMario Brothers clone in semi-playable form. I gather that William Kendrick would appreciate comments on these games before he gets them into their final form.

It is a fairly simple matter to create sophisticated text displays with Atari 8-bit computers. Graphics 2 and 3 modes are a natural for announcements. The split screen makes it easy to have scrolling text in graphics zero as well. The twenty and forty column screens are easy to read at a distance. This makes them useful for video notice boards. Dr. Thomas Drake reports that the University of Maryland Medical Centre uses Atari 8-bit computers to broadcast closed circuit announcements and information across a multi-building television network. I have heard that the Cleveland Museum of Natural History has been using an Atari 800 for public display purposes for the last 13 years. There are several reports of cable information channels using Atari 8-bit computers for displays. Airport information displays are another common use. An Atari dealer in Orlando (Florida) reports that many apartment complexes use Atari XE's for information displays. He says that after a good (bad?) thunder storm he gets a few XE's from them for repair. He finds that 800XL's hold up much better in storms. John Harris wrote a commercial Atari 8-bit program for display creation in 1986. It was called Infosoft 5000, and was published by INFO/soft technology. This software could mix Graphics 8, 7.5 and GTIA modes on the same scanline. Large letters were drawn using multiple characters, otherwise it used the standard text modes. There is a current version that uses Graphics 8 mode, and bit-maps many font sizes and styles. All these fonts are proportionally spaced, and text is kerned. John lists uses of his software as cable TV, hotels, arrival and departure schedules in (Maui Hawaii) airports, electronic newspaper and classified ad networks. It is rumoured that IBM has used a version of Infosoft 5000 at its corporate headquarters. John Harris suggests a neat slogan that goes something like: "Atari 8-bit computers, what IBM uses when THEY get down to business".

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parallel with exchange of text and image files. So impressive is MagiCMac that some publishers are considering designing utilities for it. OverScan in Germany is rumoured to have developed a hardware card for Macintosh computers with PDS slots. This card provides ST-compatible serial, parallel and MIDI ports. Apparently there is a version of MagiCMac that will run on PowerPC Macs in emulation mode. The MagiCMac software and a 68040 Macintosh Performa, complete with colour monitor, CD ROM, 550 MB hard drive and 8 MB of RAM, would cost less than $2500 (CDN) locally.

Apparently, many ST users in Germany have taken to using MagiCMac, but they want to use Calamus desk top publisher rather than the Mac alternatives. This has put pressure on the Calamus programming team to continue upgrading modules for the Atari version of Calamus SL. Until now they have been concentrating on Windows based versions. However they noticed that the Atari market, which seemed almost dead, has started to move again. There is no Macintosh version of Calamus. And it has been said that a lot of the new sales of Calamus are due to Mac users who have seen the MagiCMac's speed increases and the power of Calamus. On another note, David Small's Macintosh emulation software was not part of the assets of Gadgets by Small when it went bankrupt. Therefore David is free to continue to support his older products and issue a new Mac emulator under another name. Apparently David is still working on upgrading the code so that it will run on a TT. David is not too happy with System 7, he says that it really does look like code to kill emulators. Still he says that he can fix it. So maybe one day TT users will be able to emulate the more recent models of Macintosh computers.

The MagiC operating system for Atari ST's was developed by Andreas Kromke. It is sold by ASH with the EASE desktop, a separate product. Andreas did not develop EASE, however he did create KAOSdesk, a public domain desktop. Now MagiC 3.0 will be available with MagXDesk, an upgrade of KAOS. MagiC is still not available for Falcon computers. TEAM Computer of Germany has announced that its NeoN software, the professional rendering, raytracing and 3D animation program for the Falcon is now available for the Atari TT and MagiCMac computers. NeoN is very powerful. It turns a fast TT into a contemporary graphics workstation. With the new version the input/output formats are the same on all platforms. So one can design on a Falcon and do the rendering at a higher speed under MagiCMac. A new version of the Papyrus word processor-publisher is nearing completion for Atari (TOS) computers. Alas, the next project is Papyrus for OS/2 computers.

Anodyne Software is continuing to upgrade its CD ROM drivers for Atari computers. The latest version 2.1 supports multiple CD-ROM drives and has a simpler GEM-based installation program. Just because your ST will run a CD-ROM drive doesn't mean that you can read CD-ROM text and images prepared for other platforms. However special software is available that makes this possible. SARA is one major product. Sometimes special versions of SARA are required for certain formats. For instance there is a version of SARA that accesses and controls the data on the Groliers Encyclopedia CD-ROM. Another Canadian company, Homa Systems of Ottawa has introduced Atari CD Master ($39.95). This is a series of front ends that enables TOS computers to access, use and view the data on a number of popular Windows based CD-ROMs such as the Time Almanac (Time magazine from 1989 to 1994). Homa Systems can supply the CD-ROMs (at $15) that CD Master will handle. There are rumours that Codehead has developed a front end for Microsoft Bookshelf CD-ROM. A new version of Image Copy (ver 4.0), a very powerful image transferring and formatting program for colour desk top publishing, will also read and write Kodak Photo CD files.

On the weekend of April 1st and 2nd, at the same time as ACE '95 in Toronto, an Atari show was held in Paris. It was organized by Composcan, and it attracted about 3000 visitors. GeSoft's Eagle computer was on display, as was MagiCMac. Among the many software displays was 'Vision', a new graphics package from ICI of France. A hardware firm called Turtle Bay demonstrated its Alligator 030 board. This replaces the 68030 in a Falcon computer with one running at 42 MHz. There are over 8000 Falcon owners in

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France. They have formed a Falcon owners club which displayed a 28 page newsletter and public domain disks at the Paris show. Elsewhere, I understand that the Swedish Atari Club celebrated its tenth anniversary by sponsoring the Nordic Atari Show at Gothenburg Sweden in June. Along with conferences and Atari exhibits, I hear that they served Swedish waffles with cloudberry jam and whipped cream. At the same time the NEAR*US group (Northeast Atari Regional User Support) held its Atari conference and swapfest.

There is still lots of life in the Atari world. And the British magazine Atari World is continuing to publish with much support and encouragement. They had more than one thousand survey replies in the first two weeks. A recent issue had to change one page before it was distributed. Apparently they ran an article on computer online pornography, complete with some choice illustrations. Joe Waters, the editor and publisher of Current Notes, has decided to give up publishing. Joe transformed Current Notes from a local Atari newsletter to a first rank magazine which he managed for eleven years. However, Joe has found energetic successors. A group headed by Howard Carson of Toronto will continue Current Notes. Howard is active in the Toronto Atari Federation, he organized ACE '95, he is involved in software publishing and distribution, and now Current Notes. As they say, if you want to get a job done, find a busy man.

Another busy man is Peter Molyneux of Bullfrog, a publisher of some of the best computer games. An interview with Peter was in the June '95 issue of Next Generation. Peter rather favours the Sony Playstation. However he says "... it's all a bit too late for the Jaguar ... If it comes down to an attractive price point, then people will buy it. But it's been out there for awhile and there hasn't been any ground breaking titles for it yet. Certainly the development that I know isn't focusing on the Jaguar at all." Alas too true. So Atari has to do its own software, keep Jaguar's price low, and hang on in the hopes that someone will create really great Jaguar games that every game player must have. And that's what Atari seems to be trying to do.

8-Bit Files

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processor. Often the damage is inconsequential. For example, a few SpartaDOS utilities show unARC errors in the Polish language documentation.

Please ARC all uploads. Bob does have a lot of hard drive capacity (for an 8-bit) but it is not infinite. There are a couple of other good reasons for compressing files: compression programs provide CRC error checking and, you can ensure all parts of a system are included in a single file.

Do not upload any file that you are not certain may legally be distributed. The fact that a piece of software is no longer commercially available does not negate its copyright or make it PD or "freeware".

If you encounter errors, have comments on any file, or can't find what you want, let Bob, Ted, or me know by Feedback. We will attempt to repair damaged files, remove them if unrepairable and will update descriptions based on valid comments. For fastest response, address your feedback to Ted (The CyberLord) for Atari 16/32-bit files, to me (jkp) for Atari 8-bit files or, to Bob (Boomer) for IBM and all others.

Happy Browsing!

Happy Birthday, GCACE!

by Rowland Grant

The May general meeting featured the Pothole BBS. Since we do not have a phone outlet in our meeting room Bob Nex brought the whole BBS. The equipment consisted of a venerable Atari 800XL with a Black Box interface attached to the parallel bus. The XL was covered with writing. I couldn't tell if the writing was hookup instructions or just doodles. The Black Box connects to a PC case containing disk drives and power supply. The most interesting piece of apparatus was the power backup unit. It's really necessary for a BBS. During the demonstration, the unit cut in momentarily due to a sudden and brief voltage change in the meeting room. Bob showed what Pothole BBS looks like to the Sysop and demonstrated some features of the Express BBS software.

The June meeting featured the latest developments in the OMEn operating system by Craig Carmichael. Craig has increased the choice of fonts and has added images to his picture display software. He showed a special program running under OMEn. This program records the temperature and other building environment parameters of the rooms in the schools in Victoria. This information can be accessed from each school by modem. It is then analysed and displayed using colourful graphs and tables. Building floor plans are also displayed complete with the location of the sensors. OMEn is a multitasking operating system. The multitasking works so smoothly that one is not always aware of it. Craig demonstrated multitasking by compiling some code and running other programs at the same time. Eventually the mouse cursor began to flicker when moved. Each task slows things down. Another neat example of multitasking is adding text to a running text editor by dragging the text file name into the editor screen. Images can be added in the same way. The OMEn core takes up little more than 30K of memory, and a modest amount of disk space for its utility files. In comparison, most other multitasking systems require megabytes of memory and a lot of hard drive space. While the demonstration was done on Craig's Atari TT, there was an Apple Macintosh computer present, also running under OMEn.

George Rose hosted the 8-bit and social SIG on May 28th. To entertain us, Ted Skrecky brought his Jaguar game system and some new games. We saw Syndicate, a game that has appeared on various computers in the past. The Jaguar version was similar, but the graphics are larger and more detailed. Ted also showed Hover Strike. This is a hovercraft tank on a shoot-em-up mission. The motion seemed to be very smooth. Ted also brought a great stack of Atari 8-bit commercial software. He bought it as bulk recycled disks from Value Village. We tried a few of the of the old games, they're still lots of fun to play. An internet SIG was held at Arnold Napp's place. Ted Skrecky showed how to log onto the Victoria Freenet, and explore internet bases.

We hadn't heard from Club Cenacle (France) for some time, and we assumed that they had faded away, but we recently received a package from them. Like us, Club Cenacle has experienced a decline in membership. They still manage to issue some excellent publications. They sent us two impressive booklets on aspects of the Atari 8-bit operating system and some newsletters. There is not a lot of Atari 8-bit literature in the French language. Club Cenacle has provided a valuable service by translating articles from Antic and Analog, and by publishing original monographs and articles. Without them, I suspect that the older Atari computers would have vanished from France years ago. Also we are now in contact with the Edmonton Atari Computer Hobbyists (EACH). They sent us six back issues of their newsletter called REACH. These newsletters are very nicely done.

When exactly did Garden City ACE begin? For a couple of years it was a somewhat informal group. However GCACE became a properly constituted club with officers in the spring of 1985, and began publishing a one page newsletter. So in its present form, our Club is ten years old. A belated happy tenth birthday to GCACE! In 1986 the newsletter expanded to include articles. Ted Skrecky was one of the first contributors, and for almost a year he served as "guest editor". In 1987 the newsletter took the cryptic title XIO3, and so it has remained. I have been reporting on Club news since 1987. Looking at old newsletters, I see that I have been doing Atari News and Rumours since July 1988. Seven years on one column! Am I getting in a rut? I hope not.

CyberTraitor Defects!

by Ted Skrecky

Recently I have not been doing too much work on the GCACE Atari ST library. The reason for this is because, since the Soviet Union collapsed into dust a few years ago, it costs very little money to become a Commie so I decided to join and become "one of them"! Consequently, my Commie activities have consumed a fair amount of my spare time. My descent into depravity started several weeks ago when I went down to Value Village and discovered that they had tons of 5 1/4" disks for sale real cheap. The price was $1.99 per package of 15 disks. I did some major oinking and got 50 disks worth of original commercial software for the Atari 8-bit along with lots of disks which I could use as "blanks", which turned out to be Commodore 64 disks. I guess Value Village must have tossed the docs for the various disks of commercial stuff but since I only paid 13 cents for each disk, I wasn't going to complain.

I was having a great time looking at these disks until the unthinkable happened.... I looked at one disk and it said "LOAD "FROGGER",8,1". I knew enough about "the enemy" to know that this was a Commie disk. I immediately belted-out an Earth-shattering scream, flung the disk across the room, jumped out of my chair and ran straight into the closet, slamming the door behind me. I waited in my closet for several hours, hoping that a burglar would break into my condo and steal the Commie disk. This didn't happen. I eventually opened the door and cautiously moved towards the disk. With trepidation, I poked the disk with my foot. Nothing happened which was a major relief to me as I thought for sure it was going to leap into the air at any moment and attack me. After overcoming my fear of this disk, I began to wonder what this version of Frogger and other such games would be like on the most evil computer system ever made by man. I decided there was only one way to find out and that would be to purchase a Commodore 64 computer for myself.

After hunting around for a bit, I found a C64 with a power supply for $5. I couldn't pass on such a good deal so I bought it. I took it home, connected it to my TV and turned it on. Surprisingly, the face of Satan didn't appear on the screen. In fact, the screen remained blank. I soon realised that this computer was dead. However, this didn't kill my desire to play Frogger on the C64 even though I always thought that anybody who badly wanted to play Frogger must be into heavy substance abuse.

After spending many nights down on Government Street, searching for the right person to do a deal with, I finally managed to purchase a C64, 1541 disk drive and a whole pile of disks for $55. Oh joy, I thought. I connected the beast to my TV and turned it on. I was greeted with the main prompt on the screen so the video was working on this system but somebody must have forgot to put this computer out of its misery as it was constantly screaming in pain. An extremely significant amount of noise was coming over the speaker on the TV set which made it difficult for me to hear the music while playing Frogger. This wasn't much fun.

My next move was to buy another C64 from one of those Thrift stores. I managed to find one that was priced at $10. I took it home and connected it to the TV. This was really great, I thought, as this computer didn't make any noise. Unfortunately, the screen was totally dark which meant that this computer, just like my first C64, was completely and utterly dead. There was only one solution to my Commie problems I could think of. I determinedly marched over to my kitchen, grabbed a steak knife, marched over to the "screaming" Commie and plunged my knife into the computer. I smiled as I twisted the knife around a bit while it was still in the computer. Yes, I found that by doing some adjustments to the RF modulator in the C64, with a steak knife, I managed to greatly decrease the amount of noise coming from the TV speaker.

Now that I had a working system, I decided to connect my C64 to my NEC composite monitor. I had the proper cable and was looking forward to having a much improved video display. Imagine my horror when I turned on the computer and discovered a horribly gimped-up video display on my NEC. I though the Commie, having detected that an Atari 8-Bit computer had previously been attached to the NEC, had decided to

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fry the circuits in my composite monitor. I hurriedly connected my Atari 8-Bit to the NEC to confirm that my NEC had been toasted but was soon quite relieved to find that the screen looked normal. Why was the video display with the Commie so totally wacked-out? I decided I needed to locate and talk to some experts that knew a lot about Commodore computers. It didn't take long for me to discover the bulletin board for the Canadian Computer Recyclers Association.

The CCRA is a non-profit organization that fixes computers and gives them to people who normally wouldn't be able to own a computer. The leader of this group is Gary Nicholls. He also happens to be the President of the local Commodore 64 club. He informed me that the C64 wouldn't work with the NEC for some technical reason to do with video output. Anyways, the C64 does work properly with Commodore monitors such as the 1701, 1702 & 1802. Gary was quite nice to me as he allowed me to give him my NEC and $30 in exchange for a 1701 monitor. Since I had two dead Commies, which I had no real use for, I gave both of them to Gary. If any members of GCACE have old computers that they are planning to toss in the dump, please contact Gary at the CCRA. The phone number for the CCRA is 388-7312 and if you phone during the week between the hours of 12:00 noon to 7:00 pm, there is a good chance you will be able to talk to Gary. As long as the price is free, he may be interested in recycling your stuff. He is particularly interested in old PC machines such as XTs. However, if anybody happens to have any Atari specific hardware that they want to junk, please contact one of the members of the GCACE executive as you might be able to get a few dollars even for 8-Bit equipment such as 1050 disk drives. By the way, I should mention that Gary has my old NEC monitor for sale. The price is $45 so, if you need a composite colour monitor for an Atari 8-bit computer, you know who to phone. Don't buy it, though, if you want to use it on a C64!

Since Gary happens to be the President of the C64 club, and I was told that membership is free, I quickly decided to join. The C64 club doesn't have a newsletter and doesn't pay rent for a meeting place so that is the main reason there is no charge for membership. However, one thing they do have is wocka wocka lots of disks. I am having a great time playing games on the C64. I recognize the names of the authors for some of these games. For example, Tony Crowther, the person who wrote my favourite game for the Atari ST which is Captive, also wrote Blagger 64 for the Commodore 64. Blagger is a platform type game and it really is quite good.

I discovered that Commodore 64 computers aren't user-friendly. The DOS is built into BASIC and you have to type all sorts of weird commands to get the disk drive to do something. To get a disk directory, you first need to type "LOAD"$",8" and then to list the directory you need to type "LIST". I much prefer the simple menu systems found with most Atari 8-Bit DOSs such as MyDOS 4.5. Another thing I have discovered about my C64 is that the keyboard easily drives me totally nutzoid. Maybe the keyboard for my C64 has seen better days but I find I basically have to bang on all the keys in order to get the characters to appear on the screen. If I try to type normally, most of the characters don't appear on the screen. Lastly, I found that you need 2 disk drives for the C64 as copying a disk usually takes 5 passes with a 1 drive system. I purchased one disk drive from Value Village and discovered that the computer system kept freezing on me while copying disks. For $30 I purchased another disk drive and a post-Tramiel era C64 and this helped me to determine that my original disk drive was having some type of internal problem. Anyways, I was rather glad that I got the version "C" Commodore 64 computer as the keyboard is much nicer on it. By the way, there is no reset button on C64 computers but you can have one installed.

Although I have been having a great time being a Commie lover, I have been doing a bit of work on the ST library. I currently have 8 disks worth of STuff to catalogue. I am going to be adding a few more things, though, before I issue a new version of the catalogue.

I should mention that having a hard drive attached to your ST really makes computing a joy. You can have all of your favourite programs all in one place which is great because it really isn't much fun if you have to hunt through hundreds of disks just to find the program you want to run. The other major advantage of having a hard drive is the speed. It hardly takes anytime at all to load a program. Having now said that there are big advantages to

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owning a hard drive, I should mention that really big, scary problems can occur. It is a good idea to have all of your important files that are on the hard drive backed-up on disks. You are probably wondering why I am talking about backing-up files to disks. Well, as it happens I own a Megafile 30 and just recently I was complaining at an executive meeting that all the partitions were full and basically I had no room left for getting new files from various FTP sites on the Internet. Anyways, that night I went to delete a 4000 byte file on my "E" partition. I began to wonder what was going on as that file was real small and yet it was taking a very long time to delete. When the directory for this partition updated itself on the screen, I nearly fell out of my chair. Not one file was left and only a few minutes ago it was filled with 14 megs worth of material.

I did a bit of phoning around and eventually contacted John Tower, the Treasurer of our club. He mentioned that the data on the drive could likely be recovered by a program called Diamond Edge 2 written by Oregon Research. This is a professional hard drive utility program that has numerous useful functions such as disk repair, data recovery, optimiza- tion, disk editing, undeleting of files, etc. The bad news is that this program costs $69.95 (US), if you order direct from Oregon Research. I asked John about public domain or shareware programs that might do the job. He could only think of one at the time and it was called ST Tools. Since ST Tools is in the GCACE ST library and since my middle name is "cheap", I decided to try using ST Tools. Normally, I wouldn't read the docs as such behaviour is not considered normal for Atari users, but since 14 megs of files could easily be lost forever, I decided to break with tradition and read the instructions. It basically said that I had to first "analyze" the partition before I could access a menu that would allow me to repair the directory.

I ran the program and selected "analyze". The program took a brief look at the "E" partition and told me that it had found an "orphaned" file. I now had the option to select "continue" or "abort". If I aborted I would not get to the repair directory menu so I clicked on "continue". I was then told that another orphaned file had been found. I selected "continue". Another alert box immediately appeared with the same stupid message. I kept on clicking and kept on getting more and more annoyed with all of these irritating little alert boxes telling about orphaned files. I eventually decided to hold down on the left mouse button while the pointer was over the "continue" button. The alert boxes were being redrawn on the screen at an alarming rate and then the repair menu appeared but I didn't have time to lift my finger from the left mouse button. The program detected I had selected something from the menu before I had a chance to look at the screen and it immediately started to create one after another of those "orphaned" files in the "E" partition. Once the program had completed, I checked the partition and found I had quite a few orphaned files but the total bytes for all of them was just 800K. That is not even 1 Meg. So, what happened to more that 13 megs of files? The answer is they were now lost in cyberspace. Since it was "game over", I decided to zero the partition. Fortunately, the files on the "E" partition weren't that important.

The good news is that I know what caused the "E" partition on my hard drive to go "kaboom". It is a bug in TOS version 1.2. If you try to write to a partition which is already full, strange things can happen to the directory. As it happens, I had done this a few times recently but it was only when I went to delete that one particular 4K file that the directory went and disappeared. I have learned a lesson and that is to back-up any important files on the hard drive to disks. I also learned that ST Tools is not a really great program and I should have purchased and used Diamond Edge 2 instead.

In other news, I would like to let everybody know that Tesseract Software still gets Atari ST Informer. The May/June 1995 issue is currently available from them. Before I go and upload this report to The Supreme Jerk (GCACE Editor) on the Pothole BBS, I would just like to mention that Office Depot still sells 720K 3 1/2" disks. The disks are expensive but, unlike high density(HD) disks, they work. Not sure if everybody knows this but high density disks don't always work on 720K drives. My brother has some high density disks and reports he had never had any problems but I once purchased a box of HD disks and I had major problems reading and writing to them. HD disks should be avoided unless you have a HD drive.